

Visitor Opportunities

The refuge is open year-round for wildlife observation, hiking, and photography. There are 40 miles of improved (primary) roads scattered through the refuge that are open to motorized vehicles, hiking and bicycling. An additional 50 miles of unimproved roads (secondary) are available for hiking and bicycling only.



photo: Ken Sourbeer



Wildlife observation is best during the early morning and evening hours with the better viewing opportunities occurring during the winter and spring months. An elevated observation deck, located at Fishbone Creek and handicapped accessible observation platforms at Shell Mound and Salt Creek provide breathtaking views of the salt marsh and coastal islands.



During the spring and summer months, American alligators are commonly sighted throughout all refuge wetland areas. Osprey, swallow-tailed kite, and bald eagle activity peaks during late spring. White-tailed deer are more readily observed during the fall and winter with the best time for viewing being at dusk along road right-of-ways. Wading birds such as white ibis, herons and egrets are often found along roadside ditches and sloughs from early spring through mid-November. Wild turkeys are frequently sighted along road right-of-ways throughout the year.



Several miles of walking trails are available on the refuge. The historic Suwannee River and its hardwood swamps can be viewed along the 0.6 mile River Trail and Boardwalk located just north of the refuge headquarters. The Dennis Creek Trail (1.0 mile loop) and the Shell Mound Trail (0.3 mile loop) are located at Shell Mound at the end of County Road 326. The Dennis Creek Trail takes you through a coastal island where you will see various bird life and unique coastal habitat. The Shell Mound Trail crosses over an ancient Indian shell midden (reaching 28 feet above mean sea level), where a spectacular view of the coastal estuary and Gulf of Mexico awaits you.

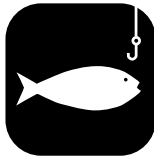


The historic Dixie Mainline Road, which connects Salt Creek and Shired Island, traverses upland pine forests, bottomland hardwoods, and tidal marshlands. This 9.0 mile improved road, which crosses through the California Swamp, is suitable for motorized vehicles and a favorite for bicycling. This road can be accessed from either County Road 349 or County Road 357.



The Canoe Trail was established to help people enjoy and learn about the lower Suwannee delta/estuarine system. The trail winds its way along the river and through several brackish and freshwater creeks. Launch sites are available at several private marinas in the town of Suwannee. Several navigational arrows in the creeks will guide you safely through the trail. With the exception of the town of Suwannee, the entire trail is bordered by refuge lands. A trail guide is available at the refuge office.

**Note: Biting insects are particularly numerous along these trails during the summer months. Use of an insect repellent is advised.**



Coastal waters, tidal creeks, interior ponds, and the Suwannee River are open year-round to fishing. Handicapped accessible fishing piers are available at Shell Mound and Salt Creek. Saltwater bank fishing is also excellent at Shired Island and Fishbone Creek. Salt Creek access is located off of County Road 349 about one mile from the town of Suwannee.



Public boat ramps providing access to the Suwannee River are located at Fowler's Bluff and the town of Suwannee. Boat access to coastal waters is available at Cedar Key, Shell Mound, Shired Island and the town of Suwannee. Small boats and canoes can be launched at Barnett and Fishbone Creeks.



Hunting of small game (squirrel, raccoon), big game (turkey, deer, and hog), and waterfowl is permitted during designated seasons. A special brochure and permit is required for hunting and is available at the refuge office.



photo: Bruce Collin



The Refuge System

The "Blue Goose" symbolizes the National Wildlife Refuge System. This system was established for the conservation and management of fish, wildlife, and plants in the United States for the benefit of present and future generations. Lower Suwannee Refuge is one of over 500 refuges nationwide. Each refuge provides a unique piece of the puzzle, securing necessary habitats needed to protect plants, animals and provide outdoor recreation.

The National Wildlife Refuge System encompasses over 92 million acres administered by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, an agency of the Department of the Interior. The Fish and Wildlife Service is also responsible for the endangered species program, National Fish Hatcheries, certain marine mammals, and migratory birds, as well as other wildlife programs.

Refuge Regulations

All motorized vehicles are restricted to use on designated roads as shown on the map on the reverse side. The use of ATV's (three and four wheelers, etc.) is prohibited.



Camping

Not permitted on the refuge, but is available at county campgrounds located on County Road 326 near Shell Mound and Shired Island off County Road 357.



Fires

Not permitted on refuge.



Collecting

Taking of government property, any artifact, natural feature, animal or plant is prohibited. Metal detectors are prohibited.



Firearms/weapons

Firearms/weapons are prohibited except during refuge hunting seasons.



Pets

Must be on a leash and under the control of the owner at all times.



Horses

Not permitted on refuge.

For More Information Contact:

Refuge Manager  
Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge  
16450 NW 31st Place  
Chiefland, Florida 32626  
352/493-0238

e-mail: [r4rw\\_fl.swe@fws.gov](mailto:r4rw_fl.swe@fws.gov)  
<http://www.fws.gov/r4eao/wildlife/nwrswe.html>

The refuge office is open Monday-Friday from 7:30 am to 4:00 pm.

# Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge

Located along the southern edge of the Big Bend Region of Florida’s west coast, Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge encompasses 52,935 acres of land in Dixie and Levy Counties. The historic Suwannee River, made famous by Stephen Foster, bisects the refuge. The refuge was established on April 10, 1979, for the purpose of protecting, maintaining and enhancing a beautiful and rare natural ecosystem.



photo: Ken Sourbeer

Along the river and its tributary creeks, the habitat consists of majestic cypress trees and flood plain hardwood forests; scrub oak communities and pine plantations are found on the upland sites. From the mouth of the Suwannee River, the refuge fronts 26 miles of the Gulf of Mexico where the habitat changes to scenic tidal marshes dotted with coastal islands. Each of these diverse vegetative communities contributes to making Lower Suwannee Refuge one of the largest undeveloped river delta-estuarine systems in the United States.

## Managing Forest and Water

Forest and water management techniques are used on Lower Suwannee Refuge to maintain or enhance habitat conditions for the various wildlife species, including endangered and threatened species. Forest management activities, including prescribed burning and selective cutting, stress the reestablishment of original vegetative communities altered by years of commercial timber harvesting. Water management activities create additional seasonal habitat for wading birds, such as white ibis, herons, wood storks, and egrets.



photo: Dick Bailey

## Wildlife

The constant influx of nutrients from the river system coupled with numerous offshore islands and tidal creeks create excellent wildlife habitat. Marine mammals such as the bottlenose dolphin and the endangered West Indian Manatee, along with several species of marine turtles, use the coastal waters of the Suwannee Sound. Natural salt marshes and tidal flats attract thousands of shorebirds and diving ducks while acting as a valuable nursery area for fish, shrimp and shellfish. Freshwater fish including largemouth bass, Suwannee bass, bluegill, redear sunfish and channel catfish are found in the Suwannee River and its creeks.

Flood plain wetlands, such as bottomland hardwood forests, wooded swamps and freshwater marsh support nesting wood ducks, black bear, otter, wading birds, raccoons, alligator and several species of wintering waterfowl. Mixed hardwood pine forests and uplands offer cover to turkey and white-tailed deer.

Over 250 species of birds have been identified on the refuge. Osprey, swallow-tailed kite and bald eagles are among the ninety species that nest on the area.



photo: Bruce Collin

